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CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING FOREIGN STUDY PROGRAMS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS.

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GUIDELINES ARE SUGGESTED FOR HELPING TO UNDERSTAND AND SELECT GOOD PROGRAMS. SUITABILITY OF SPONSORSHIP SHOULD BE DETERMINED, SINCE ACADEMIC, RELIGIOUS, PRIVATE EDUCATIONAL, AND COMMERCIAL ORGANIZATIONS HAVE DIFFERING CONCERNS AND STANDARDS. REPUTATION AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SPONSOR SHOULD BE CHECKED BY A CAREFUL READING OF ADVERTISING MATTER, INQUIRIES TO THE ADVERTISER (OR TO FORMER STUDENT OR LEADER PARTICIPANTS), OR A CONFIDENTIAL REQUEST FOR INFORMATION TO THE SUPERVISOR OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES OF ONE'S STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT. CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF STUDENTS, SELECTION OF GROUP LEADER, STUDY PROGRAM, ARRANGEMENTS FOR LIVING ABROAD, AND FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS ARE ALSO DISCUSSED. (AF)

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# CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING FOREIGN STUDY PROGRAMS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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# CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING FOREIGN STUDY PROGRAMS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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## Foreword

The study of modern foreign languages in the secondary schools of the United States constitutes an important part of the total educational experience of our youth. During the past ten years great emphasis has been put on the development of the basic skills of understanding and speaking of the languages taught, for our educators realize that with the acquisition of these skills the students can be put in direct contact with the peoples of other nations.

In 1965 the National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages appointed a committee to study the present status of study and travel abroad programs offered to secondary school students. It was found that there were many programs of this nature and that guidelines were needed which could help students, parents, and teachers understand the nature of programs being offered, as well as how to select those which would offer a genuine educational experience for the students.

The guidelines presented here were prepared for the Council by Dr. Stephen A. Freeman of Middlebury, Vermont. They reflect his vast experience and interest in the field of foreign language study.

These guidelines were thoroughly studied by the Council and approved at the annual meeting of the organization in New York City on December 28, 1966. They are presented here as a statement of the Council and as its official position on travel and study programs abroad for American secondary school students. They are distributed by the Department of Education of the various states after being approved by the chief state school officer.

NCSSFL — 1967

# CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING FOREIGN STUDY PROGRAMS
# for
# SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

This Council recognizes the very great value of foreign travel and study. The contact with a foreign culture, when properly prepared and guided, can be a personal experience of the greatest importance, broadening the individual's cultural horizon and leading him to a better understanding of other peoples. Study abroad, when properly prepared and conducted, can be an enriching intellectual experience, advancing the person's knowledge of various subjects in ways not possible at home. The Council, therefore, encourages and supports the programs of high quality which make available to secondary school students these valuable experiences.

At the same time, the Council is alarmed by the rapid proliferation of so-called "study" programs offered by hundreds of organizations, private, commerical or "non-profit", which take advantage of the tremendous popularity of foreign travel. The chief objective of many of them seems to be to enroll the largest possible number of persons, without regard for quality, selectivity, preparation, or effective academic control. Such programs are widely advertised, create an attractive image of affiliation with the foreign academic community, and appeal to teachers as a way to get a free trip abroad.

Confronted by the deluge of publicity, the students, their parents, conscientious teachers, and school administrators are seeking guidance. They propose that some organization should "accredit" the acceptable programs. This does not seem feasible at present, partly because of the limited information available, its constantly changing nature, the inevitable omissions, and partly because it would be unwise to publish a blacklist or any statement equivalent to it.

It is essential and urgent, however, that some method be devised to assist interested persons in evaluating a certain program, its quality and suitability for a given objective. A set of clear and simple criteria can serve as guidelines, clarifying the essentials of a high-quality program, and as warning signals when further questions need to be asked before a student enrolls or even applies for enrollment. This is a highly complex matter, and "yes" or "no" answers are not always possible. Yet in the present dangerous situation, American high school teachers and administrators must become much more critical and discriminating, on the basis of information which they should secure, before permitting our teen-agers to become involved in the risk of an unfortunate experience.

The National Council, therefore, suggests the following Guidelines for the Evaluation of Foreign Study Programs for Secondary School Students:

1. SPONSORSHIP:

   A. What kind of organization operates the program?

      1. Academic: a degree-granting college or university; a public high school; a private secondary school? These are usually responsible to some accrediting agency, and try to maintain quality for the sake of their own students. They may accept outsiders.

      2. Religious: church organizations, or fellowships, or orders; usually for some type of charitable service abroad rather than study. Admission is often restricted, highly selective, and the objectives are limited.

3. Private educational: includes everything from reputable agencies like The Experiment in International Living, The Council on Student Travel, and The American Field Service, to anonymous agencies operating out of a post office box number. The term "non-profit" signifies little in this context. Many of these agencies style themselves "Schools" or "Institutes"; many have university people on their boards of directors; others have no board of directors. The greatest problems and dangers lie in this category, since these private agencies are answerable only to themselves. Some are good; some are downright dishonest.

4. Commercial: travel agencies, steamship, and air lines. These concern themselves chiefly with transportation and tours, leaving the study program to some agency abroad, such as Summer Courses for Foreigners at a university. Usually, little academic supervision is provided.

B. The reputation and responsibility of the sponsoring organization should be checked in the following ways:

1. Careful reading of the "fine print" in the advertising matter, noting length of experience; amount of direct control abroad; quality of its academic Board of Advisers; methods of recruiting; vague statements or exaggerated claims, etc.

2. Inquiries addressed to educators or advisors named in the advertising, especially if they are known to you.

Beware of vague generalizing "recommendations" of the value of foreign travel.

3. Inquiries addressed to parents of students who have participated in former years. Insist on getting a list with addresses.

4. Check with leaders or chaperones of former years, especially those in your vicinity, about their experience.

5. Make a confidential request for information, by phone, to the Supervisor of Foreign Languages in your State Education Department.

6. Apply carefully the following criteria for evaluation of the program.

## II. RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF STUDENTS

A. Does the program accept <u>any</u> student who applies and pays the fees? This is the clearest danger signal of a low-quality program. Not every secondary school student is fit or ready for a summer abroad, in a group, away from parents, and at least partially unsupervised. An approvable program must show <u>selectivity</u>, on the basis of:

1. Character, maturity, dependability, self-control, adaptability.

2. A good school record, good citizenship, above-average grades.

3. Some knowledge of the foreign country, its language, and culture.

4. Absence of physical or psychological disabilities or handicaps.

B. Homogeneous grouping. Are students of all ages and levels of social maturity placed in the same group? If so, problems are inevitable.

III. SELECTION OF THE GROUP LEADER (Director-Chaperone)

A. Does any person who recruits a certain number of students become the chaperone of the group? This is another common danger-signal. The signal becomes clearer when the person receives a free trip for this recruiting, and an added bonus for each additional recruit. It may be claimed that the chaperone can handle better a group which he knows personally. Nevertheless, not every person is fitted to be the leader-chaperone of a study group abroad.

B. The selection of the leader-chaperone should be entirely separate from recruitment or financial considerations, and should be based upon the following qualifications:

1. A mature adult, enough older than the group to command its respect; skilled in handling teen-agers; wise, understanding, resourceful. He replaces the parent.

2. Some familiarity with the foreign country, its culture and mores.

3. Considerable fluency in the foreign language.

4. A willingness to devote nearly his entire time to the group. He should not expect to pursue studies or research of his own.

IV. STUDY - A definition of the objective of the program is of first importance. Travel-tours of foreign countries, if wisely conducted, can be highly educational. Home-stays, i.e. living with selected families, can be an enriching personal experience.

Neither of these are <u>study</u>. The confusion of travel and cultural contact with study is the cause of many problems. Study, especially if it is to be counted for academic "credit" by the home school, must be genuine intellectual effort in a specific body of knowledge, with reading, exercises, discussions; controlled and validated by tests and reports equivalent to those expected at home. The following questions arise:

A. Where will the student study? Many programs speak deceptively of study in a foreign university, under university professors. Foreign universities are closed in summer; and do not accept secondary school students. The truth is that students may be enrolled in Special Courses for Foreigners, or be taught by specially hired assistants in the otherwise empty classrooms.

B. What will the student study? Good courses in the foreign language, literature, and civilization are available for students at the intermediate level in the language. They should not go abroad to <u>begin</u> the foreign language. If courses in history, fine arts, social studies, etc., are promised, they will probably be taught in English.

C. Will the classes be homogeneous? Are proficiency tests in the foreign language given? Or will students of all levels of preparation, in the language and in the subject matter, be thrown together? This is a common fault of small groups. One result is that students talk English to each other all the time.

D. What academic control will there be? Foreign universities have no attendance rules. The American student quickly learns to "cut" classes, thus disrupting the instruction schedule. Attendance, written exercises, final examinations, equivalences of American grades and "credits" — all these depend on the effective supervision of the American program director. Who is he? What experience does he have? Is he in continuous charge of the group?

E. If travel is mixed with study, when is it done — before, after, or on weekends? What is the proportion of each? Which gets the most attention? Does the travel serve to illustrate the study, or is it a separate feature? Do the class teachers accompany the group.

V. LIVING ABROAD

A. Housing. Will the students live and take their meals in an empty university or secondary school dormitory? That is usually what is meant by "on the university campus." Will the chaperones live in the dormitory with them, or what supervision will the students get? Under these arrangements, the students talk English most of the time, and have little or no contact with the foreign culture.

Or will the students live with families? How are they selected? Families willing to take student boarders in summer are scarce, and only the best programs have an adequate list of good families (not merely boarding-houses). This arrangement is more successful in the provinces and small towns.

B. Social life and "free time." How "free" can an American teen-ager abroad for the first time be permitted to be? The different customs and mores, including boy-girl relationships and the drinking of wine and beer, the culture shock, even homesickness, greatly increase the need for constant presence of a wise and understanding counselor, not merely a "chaperone."

A clear danger-signal in any secondary school age program is the statement that the participants will have large segments of "free time" to explore the foreign culture "on their own."

## VI. FINANCIAL

A. Enrollment. Is an application fee, non-refundable or only partially refundable, required with your application? If so, it is evidence that there is no selectivity, and you are buying blindly.

B. Travel. Do the basic fees cover <u>all</u> transportation expenses, or only the plane from New York to Paris, leaving you to pay transportation to the location of the program, plus innumerable costs such as taxis, busses, meals, and tips en route?

C. Travel Tours. Are tours included in the "study" program, and how many, of what duration? Are the costs of tours before, after, or weekends included in the basic fee or are they "extras." Read the "fine print." The extras may make a very expensive total. Are the tours properly chaperoned and expertly conducted? "Free time" on a tour often means unguided, inefficient use of the time, especially for a teen-ager abroad for the first time.

D. Insurance. Is medical, accident, and baggage insurance included in the plan? Just what does it cover, in what amounts, and what does it cost? It is folly to go without it.

## VII. CONCLUSION. Caveat Emptor.

Any reputable organization offering a program of study abroad has a reputation to build and to maintain. It cannot dictate terms to the American public, nor refuse to answer legitimate questions. Our basic advice in the whole situation is therefore: Be on your guard; be skeptical; ask questions until you are satisfied; do not enroll or pay any money until then. And after you return from abroad, tell others of your experience and evaluate it honestly.